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ABSTRACT

The concept of self-esteem is in no way absolute. Its determinants, variations, and complex nature are continuously being challenged. This study examined the adolescent female's perception of herself, as well as her evaluation of the communicative relationship with her mother. Subjects (N=26) were female high school students, ages 15-18. Subjects completed the General Population Questionnaire, the Index of Self-Esteem, and the Parent Adolescent Communication Inventory. Findings supported the hypothesis that the adolescent female who perceives herself as having high self-esteem will also perceive a positive communicative relationship with her mother. No information as to the causality or reasons for the association of the variables can be inferred. Possible explanations can only be had through further research, investigation and humanistic interviews. (ABL)

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Mother-Daughter Communication and the Daughter's Perceived Self-Esteem

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> Whenever two people meet there are really six people present -- there is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other sees him, and each man as he really is (William James, 1890, p. 10).

"Self-concept" and "self-esteem" are two fairly synonymous, constructs which have been questioned, explored and researched for the last forty years. As the nucleus of hundreds of hypotheses, a variety of psychologists, counselors and social science professionals have been intent on defining the "human self-concept" by investigating its antecedent conditions and consequences and generally attempting to formulate some basic guidelines to explain how self-concept originates and how one's level of self-esteem either increases or decreases.

The concept of self-esteem is in no way absolute. Its determinants, variations and complex nature are continuously being challenged. An introductory overview of this present body of research is adequately provided by three major contributors to the field of self-concept; Lecky, Sullivan, and Horney.

Lecky (1945) considers the self to be the "nucleus of personality" which is both constant and changeable and, as an adjunct to this, that each person's self is individually unique while concurrently having a social origin. Following this perspective Sullivan (1947) and Horney (1950) see the origins of the young self as being in the hands of "significant" people, i.e., parents. Sullivan pursues this

idea one step further in that the attitudes and feelings of these significant people can be communicated to their offspring. The consequence of such a supposition is that the familial experiences of a young person play an important role, and serve an integral function, in the development of one's self-image and esteem. Communication theorist, George A. Miller (1974), combines the above mentioned positions in a brief synopsis statement, "when a child is born, it is part of its own mother who, by verbal and other play, begins to teach the child its own separate existence and identity" (p. 150).

For the purposes of this paper, two areas of human experience will be studied: 1) one's perceived self-concept at a particular developmental period, adolescence, and 2) one's perceived level of communication with a significant other, the mother. The area of the adolescent female's self-esteem and its contingency on her communicative capacity with her mother sheds light on the following questions: How is self-concept most appropriately and operationally defined? How does one's self-image originate? And when its existence is identified, what factors, such as communicative interaction, augment or decrease an individual's perception of self? What significance does one's self-concept have on a person's overt behavior? And lastly, how, if any, is this significance measured?

Theoretical Rationale

Purpose in Combining Research in Adolescence, Self-Concept, Parent-Child Interaction and Communication

Adolescence is a time of evaluating one's emotional and physical make-up. Today's teenagers are met with an increasing amount of input from parents, peers and society which they sort through or combine to assist them in their self-discovery process. Communication between parents and their adolescents is frequently tense, difficult and without satisfying resolution. Teens seem to resent the offered help and reject any hint of guidance from their parents while also reaching out for their continued attention, love and acceptance.

The body of literature and research on self-concept and its adjuncts is complex. Yet, there does exist a paucity of specific research investigating how one's self-concept is effected due to one's communicative interactions with parents. Bienvenu (1969) notes that "studies dealing exclusively with the measurement of parent-adolescent communication appear extremely limited" (p. 117). For the purpose of the following research, self-concept has been identified within a particular population, adolescent females, and paired with one parallel aspect of behavior, communication between mother and her adolescent daughter. Evidence has been collected that in today's families, where love is supposed to prevail, there is a tragic lack of

love is supposed to prevail, there is a tragic lack of understanding, listening, and empathy among parents and their adolescents. In short, a lack of communication which is creating breakdowns between parent-adolescent relations. Ruth Wylie (1961), in her book appropriately titled The Self Concept, highlights the purposive aspect of this paper, "...all personality theorists who are concerned with constructs involving the self accord great importance to parent-child interaction in the development of self-concept" (p. 121).

Statement of the Problem

If the contributors of the female adolescent self-esteem could be assembled together, aspects such as physical appearance, mental aptitude, family constellation and socioeconomic status would all prove to be valid antecedents providing her with either positive or negative ingredients towards her ever changing self-esteem and self-image. Yet, questions such as "What impact, if any, does the adolescent female's relationships with her mother have on her growth to adulthood?" and, "What importance needs to be given to how mothers communicate to their teenage daughters?", would remain unaccounted for and unanswered.

It is in critical consideration of these questions that the following research on the adolescent female's perception of herself, as well as her evaluation of the communicative relationship with her mother, is based.

Hypothesis to be Tested

Due to the nature of the parent-child interaction and its complex influence on the development of the child's self-concept, this study focuses on the continuing maternal contribution to the female's self-concept, during adolescence, through their patterns of communication. By testing the adolescent female subjects on both self-esteem and mother-to-daughter perceived communication measures, the anticipated conclusion is as follows:

> The adolescent female who perceives herself to have high self-esteem will also perceive a positive communicative relationship with her mother.

Design and Methodology

The validity of the self-concept as a measurable psychological construct has been questioned frequently during the past three decades of self-evaluation research (Allport, 1943; Engel, 1959; Lowe, 1961). The premise seems to be that if something exists it can be measured yet, when the "something" is an inner experience such as self-esteem, can the attitudes associated with one's self evaluation be effectively conveyed through the outward activity of taking a self-esteem test? "Is the self-concept a fact which, having an objective existence in nature, is observed and measured; or is it an epiphenomenon of deeper reality, invented by man that he might better study his behavior?" (Lowe, 1961, p. 335). This research is based on the belief that self-esteem

and self-concept is a tangible and existing measurable construct which every individual possesses at varying degrees of intensity and with different levels of awareness, due to the person's age and cognitive development.

This research is primarily considered a naturalistic study due to the presence of the two naturally occurring variables; mother-daughter communication and the daughter's perceived self-concept. This type of research represents a correlational study which is designed to investigate a potentially causal relationship between these "uncontrolled" and natural, yet measurable, variables.

It must be noted at this time that it is this study's contention that it was not necessary to assess the parents' perception of the relationship with their offspring, as it is the child's self-concept and her perception of parental behavior that explain the variation in self-esteem of the adolescent. Since the child interprets the interactions between herself and her mother, it is her own unique definition of the parental interaction that is most significant to her, as well as for purpose of this particular research (Gecas, 1971). In considering the usefulness of providing the child's responses to the interaction between her and her mother, Montemayor and Eisen (1977) described, "What appears to be the self for the child is only the set of elements from which the adolescent infers

a set of personal beliefs and psychic style that uniquely characterize himself" (p. 318).

Instruments

The following indexes were used to measure and assess the two separate variables of self-esteem and the mother-daughter communicative relationship. The basic nature of the study was correlational dealing with naturally occurring variables which were in no way controlled or altered through experimentation.

Three instruments were used: the General Population Questionnaire; the Index of Self-Esteem; and the Parent-Adolescent Communication Inventory.

The General Population Questionnaire

This was a brief three-item questionnaire designed to gather the necessary demographic information about the respondents. These questionnaires were attached to the research surveys and upon tabulation/calculation of the results, correlated to the scores per age and living situation so that these dependent variables could be noted and included in the relevant information regarding the two main variables of self-esteem and mother-daughter communication which were being tested.

The Index of Self-Esteem

The Index of Self-Esteem is a 25-item scale that measures the degree of difficulty the adolescent is experiencing in terms of his/her self-concept and self-esteem

(Hudson, 1978). Its structure is with half of the items being positive in nature, i.e., "I think I make a good impression on others" and the remaining items being negative self-statements, i.e., "I feel that others have more fun than I do." The scoring is done by identifying those positive statements on each of the completed scales and reversing the scores so that on a 1 to 5 point system, with 5 being "most or all of the time", those statements responded to with a 5 changed by the tester and marked 1, scores of 4 become 2 and so on with 3 remaining constant. The result of such score inversion is that after the points are tabulated, the smaller the score of the self-esteem index, the more positive and higher self-concept. A score of 15 on the ISE would then indicate a relatively high perception of self for the individual who had completed the questionnaire. Those scores that range from 35-55 reveal the strong possibility for self-concept problems and lower self-esteem. It must be noted that this does not provide any information on the source or cause of the presenting problem. Its main usefulness is its applicability in measuring the severity, intensity or magnitude of a client's problem.

Parent Adolescent Communication Inventory

The Parent Adolescent Communication Inventory (PACI) originated from the self-concept work of Millard Bienvenu in the late 1960's and his understanding of the importance of the parent-child interaction. The inventory can be

especially useful for clinical diagnostic purposes, teaching, assessment of client's change, as well as research. The PACI is most appropriate for the testing of the second variable of this study; mother-daughter communication as perceived by the teenage daughter. The inventory's forty items were created to specifically gauge the degree to which the communication taking place between the mother and her adolescent daughter is positive or problematic. The test is designed to assess the adolescent's perception of the communicative relationship with her mother and it is for this reason that Bienvenu's scale is appropriate for this study.

Respondents and Procedures

The population consisted of a total of 26 female subjects, ages 15-18, attending a public high school in Los Angeles, California. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of their ages and living/home situation which was provided through the General Population Questionnaire.

The testing site was in Los Angeles, California. Of the sixty slips handed out, 26 were returned which indicated as approximate 45-50 percent return rate. Identification numbers were utilized to provide anonymity and assurance to parents and school officials that those girls who had volunteered would in no way be individually identified through publication or any other means of publicity, therefore, utmost confidentiality was assured.

The girls were instructed to keep discussion to a minimum while answering the questionnaires and were encouraged to ask the tester any questions as they worked their way through the items. Upon completion of the ISE, the questionnaires were handed in and the second scale, the PACI, was administered, explaining the scoring and checking procedures. Again, the same instructions were given to the girls to keep conversation to a minimum and take as much time as necessary and that there were no right or wrong answers, just how they were feeling at the present time. After the PACIs were returned answered, the girls were asked these questions:

1. How do you feel now? Any different than when you took the test?
2. Did you discover anything new about yourself that surprised you or that you want to think about?
3. Have you ever taken a test like this one before?
4. Any other comments or questions?

The girls were thanked for their assistance and cooperation and the total testing time for both scales and discussion was 20-25 minutes.

Methods of Analysis

The purpose of collecting data on both the adolescent female's self-esteem and her perception of her interaction with her mother was to determine the degree of correlation between these two naturally occurring variables. The

hypothesis was designed to identify the probability of a zero, positive or negative correlation between self-esteem and communicative interactions with teen daughter and mother. This research, therefore, is considered a correlational study, designed to investigate the potentially causal relationship between these described variables which are "uncontrolled" in terms of experimentation, yet are considered measurable variables due to available testing devices which are utilized to specifically test the extent of these variables and once tested, can be transferred to statistical terms and considered experimentally as opposed to guesswork and speculation. The methods used to test the hypothesis that these two variables are, to some degree, related is the Pearson Product Moment coefficient, "r" and the t-test.

Analysis of the Data

The hypothesis stated in this study reads 'The adolescent female who perceives herself to have high self-esteem will also perceive a positive communicative relationship with her mother'. Through the application of two separate instruments, the hypothesis was tested for its validity and significance. For purposes of clarification, the results from the testing procedure will be reviewed, with a final overview of the differences, and similarities, within the group and the applied measuring devices for the investigated correlation between adolescent female self-

esteem and the level of communication between the adolescent and her mother.

The 26 girls who participated in the study completed the General Population Questionnaire, the ISE and the PACI. The scores were tabulated and overall statistical analysis computed by the research.

Testing With the ISE and the PACI

The testing process with the subject group of 26 adolescent females involved the General Population Questionnaire, the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) and the Parent-Adolescent Communication Inventory (PACI).

Scores from the ISE were calculated with reverse-scoring on the positively worded items resulting in lower scores denoting greater self-esteem of the respondent. The ISE scores of these 26 female subjects, ages 15-18, were paired with scores from the PACI. The scores summed from the forty-item PACI provided a final numerical value ranging from 0 to 120, with the higher score implying a higher level of mother to daughter communication.

Calculation of the correlation coefficient, determined an $r = -.53$, $p < .01$. An interpretation of these findings is that as scores on the self-esteem index increased, to denote poor or lower self-concept, paired scores from the PACI decreased, inferring negative and lower levels of interaction and communication between the adolescent daughter and her mother. The inverse association is also true of a negative

correlation in that as self-esteem scores become smaller numerically, a suggested higher of self-concept is identified and the scores from the communication inventory increase, representing positive communication as perceived by the daughter and reflected in her scoring on the PACI.

To test the significance of the r value of -.53, the "t" test was performed and a high t value of -3.06 was calculated. With 24 df, and p < at .01, the two-tailed critical value of t is 2.79, since the t value of -3.06 exceeds the tabled value, it is concluded that the two researched variables are definitely associated in the population, so that the population correlation coefficient is greater than zero (See Table 3).

Once again, the negative correlation points out an interesting picture according to the scales which were used. The scoring of the ISE was reversed for those 12 positively worded items, providing lower scores to indicate higher self-concepts, while the PACI items were scored from 1 to 3 with the final tally of scores accumulating a high numerical value to express high, positive levels of communication between parent and child.

From correlational statistics, it was determined that the two variables of adolescent female self-esteem and mother-daughter communication, as perceived by the teenager, were highly significantly related. These findings support the hypothesis being tested that the adolescent female who

perceives herself as having high self-esteem will also perceive a positive communicative relationship with her mother. It again must be reminded to the reader and future researcher, that these correlation scores infer no information as to the causality or reasons for the association of the variables (Bienvenu, 1969) and that it will only be through serious pursuit of further research, investigation and humanistic interview and exploration that the possible explanations, which are integral to the development of positive self-concepts and interactions with others, will be offered for experimentation and testing.

Table 4 displays the means of self-esteem and communication scores according to age and home situation. The means from the subject groups indicate older teens have greater self-esteem and communication than younger revealing a general trend of higher self-esteem among older teens than younger which disagrees with Dickstein (1978) and Coopersmith (1967) who found younger to be positively correlated with higher levels of self-esteem. Scores of 28.36, inferred a slightly higher perceived self-esteem for those older teens from both parent homes. Through calculation of group means, the t-test for differences between means of two independent groups was integrated into the statistical networking to determine whether the "performance" between the age groups was significant. Age of the respondent significantly effects self-esteem scores, $t(58) = 2.85$, $p < .01$. Other means that

were calculated for the purposes of brief discussion were those of girls' reported self-esteem and home situations. As mentioned earlier, those girls from both parent homes revealed generally higher self-esteem than girls from one parent or parent and step-parent homes. These mean scores were replicated in the communication scores, as girls from both parent homes had higher, more positive levels of communication than their counterparts living in parent and step-parent homes. Yet, it seems that girls in one-parent living situations reported more positive levels of interaction with their mothers which supports Fox and Inazu (1979) conclusions that girls who possessed more insight into social issues and more advanced healthy levels of communication with their divorced, or single, mothers, yet these same subjects provided complimentary data to past research (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965) that children from broken homes have lower self-esteem than their peers from homes where both natural mother and father are present.

The testing of subjects, with the ISE and the PACI, revealed a significant correlation between female adolescent self-esteem and her communication with her mother.

Conclusions and Summary

The self-concept and perceived existence of self-esteem within each individual is complex and not easily defined or diagnosed. Its influences are as mysterious as the "self" and the uniquely individual make-up each person possesses.

Based on earlier self-concept research by Wylie (1961), Coopersmith (1967) and later by Dickstein (1978) and Bienvenu (1971), this study pursued the investigation of only one, of many possible antecedents of the teenage female's degree of self-esteem; her communicative relationship with her mother. "For any daughter, the relationship with her mother is the first relationship of her life, and may also be the most important she will ever have" (Hammer, 1976, p. 3). It was in recognition of the critical importance of this shared relationship between mother and daughter that the question of how either a positive or negative degree of this relationship is transmitted is now being explored by examining the content and pragmatics of communication. The impact of the mother-daughter relationship touches all facets of the maturing female's physical and emotional growth as well as her identity within society. It is the positive, or negative, strength of this association with her mother that can either foster or hinder the young girl's satisfaction and acceptance of her identity and self.

Much of the focus from preceding studies on mother-daughter communication (Fox, & Inazu, 1979; Bienvenu, 1969; Kanter, & Zelnik, 1972; Dickstein, 1978) has been on the content, or subject matter, of communication between a mother and daughter as opposed to the manner in which interactions take place or are transmitted. The question this research was interested in exploring, through human survey, was "How

mothers and daughters communicate" instead of "What they communicate."

The pragmatics of the mother-daughter relationship were surveyed from the teenage daughter's perception using one, of the very few, available questionnaires which required adjustments to certain items so that the mother was the only parent being evaluated in the inventory. Working from a research philosophy that self-concept and degree of one's self-esteem is contingent upon environmental input from family and close significant others, the target population of adolescent females was chosen through the subjects availability and provided the data from which statistical correlational inference was drawn pertaining to levels of self-esteem and level of communication between the female subject and her mother. Carl Rogers (1973) and Alfred Adler (1958) have long praised the power of positive interactions and have created counseling theories founded on the formula of developing positive ways of interacting in order to create and maintain one's positive self-image. It was this study's goal to lend even more validity and credence to this viewpoint and apply Carl Rogers' perspective that "...interpersonal relationships best exist as rhythm-openness and expression, and then assimilation; flow and change, then a temporary quiet; risk and anxiety, then temporary security" (p. 14) and of Virginia Satir, "...parents are in the business of peoplemaking" (p. 3) and therefore the messages

parents provide to their offspring, and the interactions that ensue, can greatly enhance or deplete the young person's concept of him/herself as they view life, their place in it, and others.

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Table 1

Distribution of Subjects According to Age and Home Setting

Reported Home Setting	Reported Ages for Subjects 15	16	17	18	Totals
Both Parents	5	4	2	0	11
Mother Only	0	4	2	1	7
Parent plus Step-parent	0	5	0	0	5
Other	0	3	0	0	3
Totals	5	16	4	1	26

Table 2

Scores on Self-Esteem Scale and
Parent-Adolescent Communication Inventory

Subject	ISE	PACI
1	16	77
2	38	89
3	38	95
4	32	70
5	6	110
6	26	90
7	13	101
8	24	70
9	49	85
10	15	106
11	37	61
12	53	23
13	14	81
14	26	101
15	33	103
16	55	54
17	26	102
18	19	90
19	39	65
20	18	107
21	21	107
22	37	75
23	27	109
24	26	47
25	29	107
26	32	15

ISE Possible Range: 0-100
PACI Possible Range: 0-120

TABLE 3

Critical Value of t if P < .01

Test	SS	df	t	P
Index of Self Esteem	26	24	-3.06	< .01
Parent-Adolescent Communication Inventory	26	24		

Table 4

Means Obtained in Measurement of Self-Esteem
And Mother-Daughter Communication

	Both Parents Home	One Parent Only	Parent and StepParent	Overall
Self-Esteem	μ= 28.36	μ= 25.88	μ= 25.75	μ= 28.81
Mother-Daughter Communication	μ= 88.91	μ= 86.75	μ= 77.25	μ= 82.31